

5833

Mr. STRONG's
S E R M O N,

At the ORDINATION of the
Rev. *SAMUEL SHEPARD,*

At LENOX.

ALBION
S. H. M. O. L.



ALBION

1871

The Nature and Design
Of the Evangelical Ministry
CONSIDERED:
And the Importance of Fidelity in it,
ILLUSTRATED;
In a Discourse Preached at the
ORDINATION

OF THE

Rev. *SAMUEL SHEPARD*,

To the Pastoral Office over the

Church in LENOX :

April 30th, A. D. 1795.

BY CYPRIAN STRONG, A. M.

Pastor of the first Church in Chatham.

STOCKBRIDGE :

Printed by LORING ANDREWS.

1795.

The State and County

of the County of

of the State of

of the County of

of the State of

of the County of

of the State of





A N

ORDINATION .

S E R M O N, &c.

1. Corinthians, IV. 1, 2. *Let a man so account of us as the Ministers of CHRIST ; and Stewards of the mysteries of God.*

Moreover, it is required of Stewards, that a man be found faithful

IN these words, we have a description of the *nature* and *dignity* of the office of a Gospel Minister. He is the Minister of CHRIST, and is made a Steward of no less important a *treasure*, than the *sacred mysteries* of God.

THE Apostle, also, suggests the importance of *fidelity* in that sacred trust. It is required of Stewards, that a man be found *faithful*." *Fidelity* in a Steward is essentially requisite. It is in its nature an office of *trust*, and fidelity is ever supposed in such an appointment ; for no man will trust his goods in the hands of one, who is not, in his view, a man of fidelity.

THE text will naturally lead to a consideration of the NATURE and DESIGN of the Christian Ministry, and the importance of FAITHFULNESS in the Gospel Minister.

IN prosecuting the subject, we shall attempt,

I. To explain the *office* and *business* of a Christian Minister, exhibited in the text. As being the *Minister* of Christ and a *Steward* of the *mysteries* of God.

II. To

II. To show when a Minister of the Gospel may be said to be found *faithful*.

III. POINT out the *importance of faithfulness and fidelity*.

I. WE will briefly attend to the *office and work* of the Gospel Minister, as exhibited in the the text.

THE APOSTLE PAUL, in our text, informs us how and in what manner Ministers of the Gospel are to be accounted and esteemed by men. I shall not spend time to show, how they *have* been esteemed, and what account has been made of the Christian Ministry, by *infidels and wicked men*, but shall consider it more particularly as described in the text.

I. THE Apostle describes the Gospel Minister, by his being a *Minister or servant* of Christ.—“*Let a man so account of us as of the Ministers of Christ.*”

SUCH men as are put into the work of the Gospel Ministry are not, on the one hand, made *Lords*, or *independent rulers* over men; nor, on the other hand, are they to be considered as in a state of *bondage and servitude* to their fellow creatures—although their work and business, as Ministers, very especially *respects* men, yet they are not subject to their authority and controul. The Gospel Ministry has a special reference to the *salvation* of mankind, yet it is not under the *direction* of men. *Ministers* enjoy those *natural rights* which belong to their fellow creatures. They are not to make the *will and pleasure* of men their rule, but are to seek their approbation, only in subordination to the will and pleasure of Jesus Christ: and *men*, on the other hand, have no right to *controul* Ministers, or to *dissate* to them what *doctrines* they shall teach, or in what manner the *ordinances* of the Gospel shall be administered; for the Gospel Minister is not the minister or servant of *men*, but of JESUS CHRIST.—He is to execute the *will* of Christ, to be governed by him in every thing, whether men will “hear or forbear.”

ON

ON the other hand, although the Gospel Minister is not to consider himself as answerable to men, or as being under their controul, yet he is not to *lord it* over them, as though he were not himself a *servant*; for he is the servant of Christ.—Although he is not to please himself, nor men, yet he must be subject to Christ Jesus.—The Apostle Peter, when he replied, in behalf of himself and the other Apostles, to the charge of the chief Priests and Council, who had commanded them to teach no more in the name of Jesus, exhibited the true spirit of his office, “*Whether it be right, in the sight of God, to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.—We ought to obey God rather than men.*” The Apostle did not feel himself to be in a state of such *bondage* to men, as to be influenced by their will and pleasure as to the doctrines he should teach; but he considered himself as the servant of Christ, and as bound to be subject to his pleasure, whatever the consequences might be, either with respect to others, or his own personal safety.

THE Minister of the Gospel, therefore, although his business is *with* men, yet he is not the servant of men, but the servant of Christ. This being the case, he is by no means to be subject to the pleasure of men—he is not to accommodate his *doctrine* or *practice*, as a Minister, either to the *prejudices* or *errors* of mankind; but is to be *wholly* dictated and *supremely* determined by the *will* and *authority* of Jesus Christ.

BUT, it may be said, this is no characteristic of the Christian Minister; for *all* Christians are the *servants* of Christ.

Answer. THAT is undoubtedly true; nevertheless, it is an observation which tends to set the ministerial office in a proper point of light. It serves to shew the Ministers of the Gospel, that however dignified their office is, yet they are not lords—that they are but *servants*, and are to be under entire subjection to Jesus Christ, as their Lord and Ruler. On the other hand, it tends to inspire the minds of mankind, with proper apprehensions
respecting

respecting Gospel *Ministers*. Particularly, it leads them to see, that *they*, in becoming *Ministers*, have not forfeited their *natural rights* into the hands of men, and are not to be subject to the *errors*, *prejudices* and *caprice* of their fellow creatures : and also, that the office of a Minister, lays him under obligations to preach and abide by the will of Christ, whether people will “hear or forbear.”

THE observation, that Ministers are the servants or Ministers of Christ, although it serves to *qualify* the office, yet, it must be confessed, it does not give a very distinguishing *characteristic* of it.—Therefore the Apostle observes,

2. THAT the Minister of the Gospel, is also to be considered as a “*Steward of the mysteries of God.*”

IN this expression, the Apostle describes the *peculiar* and *distinguishing* nature of the ministerial office. In his saying that Ministers are “*Stewards of the mysteries of God,*” he briefly comprehends their *whole* work and business as Ministers of Christ. In this passage, the Apostle alludes to a great house or family, wherein *one* servant is set apart, to whom the master commits his goods, to be dealt out to the other servants and dependents, as *occasion* may require, and as the *master* directs. This servant is called a *Steward*.—In allusion to that, *Ministers* are called *Stewards*; as having something committed to them, to be distributed to others as occasion requires, and as Jesus Christ directs.

THE Apostle expressly teaches us, what *that* is which Christ Jesus has committed to the Ministers of the Gospel. It is not *silver* or *gold*, *precious stones* or *costly jewels*, but the *treasure* comprehends all “*the mysteries of God.*”

By the *Mysteries of God* we are to understand the *doctrines*, *precepts* and *sacraments* which are enjoined in his word. The sacred scriptures contain a *system of truths* and *institutions*, which are designed for mankind. This system is often called a *mystery*; probably, because the
principal

principal and capital truths which are contained in it; were originally *secrets*, and so matters of *mere revelation*; and cannot, even now, be comprehended in their *full* import and extent.

Nothing can be more evident, than that the doctrines of the Gospel, comprising the sacraments and institutions of the Christian religion, are called *mysteries*. "*We speak, (says the Apostle Paul) the wisdom of God in a mystery.*" "*Great is the mystery of godliness; God manifest in the flesh,*" &c. Our Saviour thus addresses his disciples, "*Unto you is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.*" By which we are doubtless to understand those *doctrines* and *truths* which relate to the kingdom of heaven. The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Colossians, calls the Gospel "*whereof he was made a Minister, the mystery which hath been hid from ages,*" &c.

WHAT makes it further evident that by the *mysteries* of God is meant the *truths* and *institutions* which are contained in the Gospel, is this; we are taught that the principal business of Ministers is to *teach* and *inculcate* those *doctrines* on mankind. Hence the Apostle Paul speaks of the Gospel as being "*committed to his trust.*" "*According (says he) to the Gospel of the blessed God committed to my trust:*" referring to his charge as a Gospel Minister; for it follows in the next verse: "*I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the work of the ministry.*" It is evident, I trust, from these references to the sacred scriptures, that, by the "*mysteries of God,*" is meant the *doctrines* & *institutions* of the Gospel. Ministers, then, are Stewards of the *doctrines* and sacred institutions of Christianity.

WHEN it is said, that Ministers are Stewards of the mysteries of God, we are doubtless to understand that the Gospel, comprising its doctrines and institutions, is, in the same *peculiar* sense, *committed* to them; that they are in a *special* sense *entrusted* with it. The office of a

Steward always implies a *trust* of goods. So when it is said that *Ministers* are *Stewards*, the very *first* idea which is conveyed to the mind is, that they, by office, are entrusted with a *treasure*; and we are clearly informed that this treasure is of no less consequence and importance than the *mysteries* of God; the sacred truths and institutions of the Gospel.

It may be observed further, that Stewards have goods committed to them, not merely for their *own* use and benefit, but to be dealt out and distributed to others. A *servant* is not entrusted with his Lord's goods, merely to *keep* them, or *enjoy* them himself, but for the benefit of others. Thus it is with Ministers of the Gospel, as Stewards of the mysteries of God. It is evident from the scriptures, that Ministers are made Stewards of the mysteries of God, comprising the doctrines and institutions of the Gospel, for the following purposes :

1. To *keep* and *preserve* them *pure* and *uncorrupted*.

As it is, in part, the business of a Steward, to *keep* and *preserve* his master's goods from injury and damage, so it is the business of Ministers, as Stewards of the mysteries of God, to *keep* and *preserve*, *pure* and *uncorrupted*, the sacred doctrines and institutions of the Gospel. Hence the Apostle Paul directs Timothy to "*hold fast* the form of sound words :—" and, says he, "that good thing which was committed unto thee, *keep*." "O, Timothy, *keep* that which is committed unto thy trust."—The Apostle Paul says, in plain terms, that he, as a Minister, was set for the defence of the Gospel.—Ministers, as Stewards of the mysteries of God, therefore, are to *keep* and *preserve*, *pure* and *uncorrupted*, the doctrines and institutions of the Gospel.

2. ANOTHER thing directly designed by the office of the Christian ministry, is, the dispensation of Gospel doctrines and institutions, or, a diffusion of the knowledge of them among mankind.

THE design of Christ, in making his Ministers Stewards of Gospel doctrines and institutions, was not, merely, their profit and advantage, by putting them into a peculiar possession of them ; but his design was that they should dispense and communicate them to their fellow men. A Steward in a household is not only to keep his Lord's goods, so that they are not injured, but, by office, he is to dispense them regularly to others. And it is the design of the office of the Christian Ministry, and the business of a Gospel Minister, to communicate and dispense Gospel truths and institutions to mankind. Hence, it is required of Ministers to be skilful in the word—to be apt to teach—and rightly to divide the word of truth.

In a word, it appears that the Gospel Ministry is the great repository of divine truth. That the Gospel, comprising its doctrines and institutions, is committed into the hands of Ministers, to be kept and preserved pure and uncorrupted ; and to be communicated to mankind. This is the plain language of our text. And, from fact and observation, it becomes evident that, when this standing mean has failed ; when Ministers have embraced errors, and corrupted the *doctrines* and *institutions* of the Gospel, the world in general has been overwhelmed in ignorance and corruption.

HAVING made these explanatory observations, I shall proceed to consider,

II. WHEN Ministers, as Stewards of the mysteries of God, may be said to be found faithful.

THE Apostle, in the text, sums up the *whole* duty of Ministers in their being faithful. When he says it is required of them, as Stewards, to be found faithful, he doth not mean that it is required of them to obtain the *approbation* of mankind—that they so preach the Gospel, and administer the institutions of it, as shall be *acceptable* to men ; but, that they be faithful in the view of Jesus Christ, their Lord and Master. Hence the Apostle says,
in

in the words which immediately follow the text, "*With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, yea or of man's judgment—But he that judgeth me in the Lord.*" Ministers are the servants of Christ, and Christ is their supreme judge. What *men* think or judge, is of very little consequence, compared with the judgment and approbation of CHRIST, who is the final judge of all men.

BUT what is it to be found faithful? what is implied in and necessary to it, is an inquiry of importance, and naturally offers itself in this place.

WE will now briefly attend to it.—The present inquiry will be confined, to those things which are included, in being found faithful, as *Ministers* of Christ, and *Stewards* of the mysteries of God.—Being *faithful* consists, in general, in a *punctual discharge* of the duties of such an office. The faithfulness of a Minister cannot be determined, by the *success* or visible effects of his Ministry. His success, in effecting the salvation of mankind, is dependent on the mighty power of God. HE succeeds and prospers means and faithful endeavours, as seemeth good unto him. God hath various purposes to answer by the Ministry of the Gospel. As Christ was "fet for the falling and rising again of many in Israel," so those purposes will be promoted, through the medium of the Gospel Ministry. We hear the faithful prophet Isaiah, lamenting, "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for naught." The prophet Jeremiah complains, that under his faithful exertions and endeavours "the wicked were not plucked away." And Ezekiel informs us, that his people "heard his words, but did them not." And the Ministry of our Saviour was very unsuccessful, as to securing the salvation of the Jews.—And, we are assured, that although Israel be not saved or gathered, yet the faithful labourer shall be glorious in the eyes of the Lord.—All which imply, that a Minister or Steward of the mysteries of God may be faithful, and yet his labours be attended with very little visible success, in securing the salvation of men.

BUT,

BUT, I would proceed, positively, to point out some things which are obviously included in a Minister's being found faithful.

I. ONE thing which is most evidently implied is, that his *heart* be engaged in the work.

IN every case where mankind are called to act, if their *hearts* are not engaged, they will ever be slack and dilatory. And we have every reason to conclude this will be the case with the Gospel Minister, if his heart be not engaged in the work. It will be a mere piece of drudgery; and he will only act over the part of the servant in the parable, who buried his talents, and accounted his Lord a *severe* and *hard* master. Indeed, the want of such an heart is, in its own nature, an instance of perfidy; for the Minister, when he enters upon the work, professedly prefers it to every other service, and engages to make it his *great* work and business.

2. To being found faithful, it is necessary that a Minister of Christ carry into *practice* and form his *life* upon the holy and self-denying maxims of the Gospel.

THE life and practice of a Minister is considered as one special mean of instruction, and as necessary to enforce, on others, the sacred precepts of the Gospel.—Our Saviour thus addressed his disciples, “*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your father who is in heaven.*” How very forcibly and pointedly does the Apostle Paul reprove such Ministers as may *teach* and *inforce* on men their duty and moral obligations, and yet not *practice* those duties themselves. He thus expostulates; “*Thou that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? Thou that preachest that a man should not STEAL, dost thou STEAL?*”—There is the same inconsistency and infidelity, in all cases, where a Gospel Minister fails, in carrying into practice, the pure and self-denying principles of the Gospel. If his life and manners are formed on the principles and by the maxims of this world, he is so far unfaithful: and instead of promoting the

the interests of Christianity and the success of the Gospel, he is a stumbling block and obstacle in the way of it ; whatever the principles and doctrines are, which compose his public discourses.

3. ANOTHER thing requisite to a Minister's being found faithful is, a diligent study and thorough acquaintance with the doctrines and institutions of the Gospel.

He is a " Steward of the mysteries of God." He has the Gospel, comprising all the doctrines and institutions of Christianity, committed to him, to defend and unfold to mankind. But how can he preserve and defend the doctrines and institutions of the Gospel, unless he be well acquainted with them ? And how can he teach and enforce them on others, unless he have a thorough understanding of them himself ?—Fidelity, therefore, in the first instance requires, that a Minister and Steward of the mysteries of God should be diligent in his studies, and painful in his researches after divine truth. Knowledge and understanding are peculiarly requisite in a teacher ; and negligence and indolence in searching for them, must argue great unfaithfulness.

4. THAT a Minister be found faithful, it is necessary that he faithfully dispenses the doctrines and administers the institutions of the Gospel.

THE mysteries of the Gospel are committed to him as a Steward, that they may be dispensed unto men ; and not used, merely for his own private entertainment or amusement. It is one part of the office of a Steward to dispense and distribute the goods committed to him. This, as has already been shown, is one great and important part of the business of a Gospel Minister, considered as a Steward of the mysteries of God. He is to communicate the knowledge of divine truths, and administer the institutions of the Gospel to his fellow creatures—I may now add, that this is a very important part of his work and office. This part of his work merits a particular qualification. I trust I shall be indulged a few particular observations on this part of the ministerial office.

I therefore observe,

FIRSTLY : Fidelity implies, that a Minister teach all the truths and dispense *all* the institutions of the Gospel.

HE is a Steward of *all* the mysteries of God. His charge and trust is not confined to *some* doctrines and truths. It has sometimes been said, that some doctrines which are confessedly taught in the Gospel, ought not to be *frequently*, if ever, handled and enforced by Ministers. Such as the doctrines of divine decrees—the sovereignty of God in the salvation of men, &c.—But may we not, yea must we not conclude, that *every* doctrine which was thought *worthy* of a place among the mysteries of God, should be taught and enforced on mankind ! Was it not because they were important to be *known*, that a place was allotted to them in divine revelation ! If so, (and we cannot account for their being *there* on any other principle) can Ministers be faithful unless they teach and enforce them ? Have they a *right* to judge *over the head* of divine revelation, what is fitting and advantageous for mankind to know ? Does not the conclusion, that doctrines and truths which Christ has seen fit to reveal, should not be publicly dispensed, imply a high degree of irreverence ?

If there are truths in the Gospel which in *some* views of them are attended with *difficulties*, yea, are incomprehensible by men, can it be a reason why they should not be taught and enforced, since Christ has given them a place in the Gospel revelation. If that were a sufficient reason, Ministers must no more preach upon the *being, attributes* and *government* of God ; for there are things belonging to those subjects which are *inscrutable* and absolutely *incomprehensible* to men. Those doctrines which Christ has revealed, and so far as he hath seen fit to reveal them, Ministers may warrantably *see fit* to preach ; for they are not to assume more wisdom or prudence, than the great author of the Christian revelation. And, Christ's revealing doctrines, and committing them to
Ministers,

Ministers, as his Stewards, is a sufficient warrant, and of the nature of a direct injunction, to preach them; for they are to "disclose the whole counsel of God."

I SEE not why in such a kind of *delicacy* and *prudence* as prompts Ministers to omit, in their preaching, particular doctrines, which are contained in the Gospel, they do not assume more wisdom & prudence than can be attributed to the great author of the Christian revelation.

SUFFER me further to observe, that in order to a Minister's being found faithful, it is necessary not only to teach *all* the doctrines and truths of the Gospel, but he must teach them and dispense the institutions *as they are exhibited* by Jesus Christ.

He is the Steward of the mysteries of God. He has no right to *alter* or *vary* them in the least; for the Gospel, being what it is, is committed to him. "Woe unto me, (said the Apostle Paul,) if I preach not the Gospel." Therein God exhibits truths & institutions as He would have them taught and administered to mankind. Ministers cannot *add* to or *diminish* from them, without breach of trust. They must make the Gospel their rule, and not accommodate its doctrines to the errors or tastes of men.

THE truths of the Gospel are so pure and holy, so illy calculated to gratify the corrupt tastes of the world, that if they are taught and enforced in their purity, without any smoothing or softening, Ministers will not, ordinarily, fail of hurting the feelings of more or fewer of their hearers. There is, therefore, a violent temptation before them, to soften and accommodate its truths to the corruptions of mankind, for the sake of *peace* and *popular applause*.

BUT will it consist with *fidelity* to seek peace by such means? Are they not the Ministers of Christ, and Stewards of the mysteries of God? In taking such measures, would they not "handle the word of the Lord deceitfully,"

fully," and corrupt the mysteries committed to their trust? and, instead of being faithful to the souls of men, would they not, by such liberties, betray them to ruin? Are men more likely to be saved by the doctrines of the Gospel, a little *softened*, than when they are held up in that strict and pure point of light in which the Gospel exhibits them? Will faithful servants thus judge? Did our Saviour misjudge, relative to the most advantageous method of revealing divine truths?

THE observations which have been made, relative to *teaching the doctrines* of Christianity, are equally applicable to the *administration* of divine ordinances and institutions. Faithfulness will induce Ministers to apply and administer them as the Gospel directs; without accommodating them, either to the prejudices or errors of mankind. No errors relative to them are necessary.—Ministers are not to please themselves nor other men, but "Christ Jesus the Lord," for they are his Ministers and Stewards. Christ's will is to be their rule in all their administrations. Seeking peace, or pleasing mankind, by adding to or varying from the will of Christ, as it is exhibited in the Gospel, must be an act of perfidy and unfaithfulness.

BUT mankind, it may be said, will have their prejudices, and imbibe many errors respecting the truths and ordinances of the Gospel: And if truth is to be *rigidly* inculcated, and the ordinances, as to their administration, are to be *strictly* regulated by it, the minds of mankind will be *so irritated*, that there will be no such thing as rectifying their mistakes; but if their errors and prejudices are a *little indulged*, they may, in time, be set right. We must become all things to all men, that we may gain some.

IN answer to such a suggestion I would ask, from whence Ministers derive power and authority to *soften or accommodate* truths and ordinances to the *tastes and errors* of men?—Did Christ give them this authority, when he made them Stewards of the mysteries of God? Did not

Christ *know*, when he made a revelation, that a little softening and further accommodation of truths and ordinances to the errors and prejudices of men, would be more likely to win them? Why then did he not adopt such a measure? Or did he design that his Ministers should have the *honor* of such an invention? Besides, where is the warrant to be found for seeking peace, or advancing the salvation of men, by any other means than by a fair dispensation of truth?

FROM the nature of the case it must be unquestionably evident, that Ministers, would they be found faithful, must preach truths and administer ordinances as they are exhibited in the Gospel.

THE idea, that it is necessary to *soften* and *palliate* doctrines, and to *shape* the administration of ordinances, by the *humours* and *errors* of men, most certainly casts the highest reflection on Jesus Christ, the author of the Gospel revelation; as it supposes, that the wisdom of men is wiser than the wisdom of Christ. It is the business of a Steward to dispense his master's goods, as his Lord directs: And the supposition, that Ministers may so far become all things to all men, as to soften doctrines and accommodate ordinances to the pleasures or errors of men, is to suppose, that they are the servants of men, instead of being the Ministers of Christ and Stewards of God.

I would observe again; That if Ministers would be found faithful, they must teach the doctrines and truths of the Gospel *clearly*, and to the *understandings* of men.

TRUTHS ought not to be exhibited, in such terms, as shall either tend to *misrepresent* them, or to *veil* them in such obscurity, as to confound the understandings of their hearers. The design of preaching is instruction.—The truths and doctrines of the Gospel must, therefore, be so exhibited as has the most direct tendency to lead the minds of mankind to an apprehension of them. It is handling the word of the Lord deceitfully, to misrepresent its doctrines, or even to use such *vague*, *indeterminate* and

and *equivocal* language, as leaves them in obscurity. Fidelity in a teacher always requires, that he teaches the truth, in a clear and determinate manner : And nothing can be more inconsistent, in such a character, than *fears* of being understood.

FURTHERMORE ; If a Minister would be found faithful in preaching, he must *rightly divide* the word of truth, and make a proper application of it.

ALTHOUGH fidelity requires, that all the truths of the Gospel, without any exception, be preached, yet there is room left for the exercise of wisdom, in adapting truths to the circumstances of mankind—in giving due weight and a proper place to the various truths, which the Gospel contains. Truths of the *greatest* consequence are to be most frequently illustrated and enforced. The various truths of the Gospel are, also, to be adapted to the circumstances of mankind. At least such an advantage is to be taken of all the circumstances which attend men, as shall give the greatest force and energy to instructions.

FAITHFULNESS consists, in a great measure, in rightly dividing the word of truth, or in applying it to the different characters and circumstances of men. Especially is this the case, respecting the *encouragements* and *promises* of the Gospel, particularly in applying them to the *secure* and *awakened*, the *penitent* and *believing*. There is, in these cases, great room, on the one hand, for faithfulness, and on the other, for unfaithfulness, by daubing “with *untempered mortar*.” If the encouragements and promises of the Gospel are *misapplied*, they are not only *misrepresented*, but mankind will be flattered towards ruin, and be in imminent danger of perishing, “with a lie in their right hand.”

THE Gospel most evidently confines the *promises* and *encouragements* of salvation, to the *penitent* and *believing*—to the *regenerate* and *real convert* :—If these are administered to impenitent sinners, whatever their other circumstances

stances may be, the Gospel is perverted, and the souls of sinners comforted, while they are in the broad way to ruin and destruction.

THERE is very great danger of unfaithfulness in this respect. A benevolent Minister, who has compassionate feelings for the souls of his fellow creatures, especially when he deals with sinners under great distress, in a view of their dreadful situation, will be in danger, out of pity, of exceeding the bounds of his commission, in administering comfort to them. He will be exposed to consider it, as being a kind of *cruelty* to preach the terrors of the Law to them, under their particular circumstances, lest they be drawn into despair. But faithfulness ever demands of Ministers, that they make truth their rule ; and so keep up the dividing line between saints and sinners, of every denomination. There is, in the sacred scriptures, a most important distinction made between *believers* and *unbelievers*. The former, whether high or low, are considered as the *heirs* of the Gospel Salvation : And unbelievers, whether *secure* or *awakened*, are viewed and treated as under the curse of the law, and as having no part in Christ. To *believers* appertain all the promises of the Gospel ; and to *unbelievers* all the curses of the Law. Therefore, to these different characters, a different portion must ever be dealt out.

CRYING *peace* unto unbelievers, is feeding them with delusion ; and instead of its encouraging them on in the way of salvation, it only flatters and establishes them in the road to ruin and despair.—Being sound faithful, therefore, consists in a great measure, in Ministers rightly dividing the word of truth ; or in a just application of it to the different circumstances of men.

THESE observations may be sufficient to point out and show how necessary it is, that the truths and institutions of the Gospel be faithfully dispensed, and in what respects, to a Minister's being sound faithful.

I SHALL

I shall only further add,

5. THAT to Ministers being found faithful, it is necessary they be *zealous, fervent* and *active* in the discharge of every part of their work, as Stewards of the Mysteries of God.

COLDNESS, *indifferency* and *sloth* peculiarly unbecome a Gospel Minister. His work is, in its nature, so excellent, and its tendency so important, as that the greatest zeal and animation is incumbent. The Gospel Ministry is the great instituted mean of maintaining the *purity* of Gospel doctrines and institutions, and of diffusing the knowledge of them in the world—it is the appointed mean of bringing about reconciliation between God and men. It is hence called “the mystery of reconciliation.” What work and business then, demands zeal & engagedness, if this does not?—If a want of fervency and zeal argue unfaithfulness in any case, it must be in a work and business of so much consequence, as that of the Gospel Ministry.

BUT I must not enlarge further under this head of inquiry. I proceed, therefore,

III. To consider the importance of what is required of Ministers in the text, viz. That they be “*found faithful* ;” Or, why Gospel Ministers should be faithful.

THEY are *Stewards of the mysteries of God* : And as the Apostle observes, “*It is required of Stewards, that a man be found faithful.*”

THERE are almost innumerable things which offer themselves to consideration under this inquiry ; but I shall only mention the following, with as little enlargement as the importance of the subject will admit.

I. THE reasonableness and importance of faithfulness, in Ministers, is obvious from the *nature* of their office.

THEY

THEY are Stewards of the mysteries of God. The office of a Steward is an office of *trust*. A Steward has goods committed to him. Such is the nature of his trust, as that faithfulness is peculiarly necessary ; for otherwise, of all the servants of his Lord, he will, ordinarily, do him the greatest injury.—This is eminently true respecting the Ministers of Christ ; they are Stewards of the mysteries of God ; and so are capable of being eminently *serviceable* to mankind, and of doing the greatest *injury* to Christ's cause. They may, by faithfully dispensing the mysteries of God to men, preserve the purity of Gospel doctrines and institutions, and be a mean of introducing their fellow creatures to the enjoyment of all the blessings of the Gospel salvation ; as they may be a mean of corrupting the Gospel, and of flattering mankind to ruin and destruction. These things are greatly dependent on the faithfulness of Ministers. If it be ever required of Stewards to be faithful (as it evidently is in all cases) it must be peculiarly so, in the case under consideration.

2. THE *end* and *design* of the office of the Gospel Ministry is such, as makes it *highly* important that Ministers are faithful.

IN this office, the mysteries of God, or the doctrines and institutions of the Gospel, are deposited. By it, as the principal mean, Christianity is to be supported and propagated in the world—the purity of its doctrines and institutions is to be preserved, and the knowledge of them diffused among mankind. If this mean fails, the great ordinary mean of salvation is unsuccessful.

THAT the doctrines and institutions of the Gospel have been so far maintained, in their purity, and the knowledge of them been diffused over so great a part of the habitable world, has been owing, under God, to the institution of the Gospel Ministry. And, nothing has been more fatal to the progress of Christianity, than the errors and unfaithfulness of its Ministers.

As the preservation of the purity, and the diffusion
of

of the knowledge of Christianity in the world, is depending on this office, so faithfulness in Ministers is a matter of the highest consequence. As the honor of Christ and the success of his cause is depending, so there is the highest motive to excite Ministers to the most faithful exertions.

THE Christian Ministry is instituted, by God, as the *principal* mean, of calling in and training up for glory, those *sons* and *daughters* which were given to Christ, in the covenant of redemption: and of carrying into execution the treaty of peace and reconciliation. It is hence, the business and employment of Ministers is summed up, in their *praying* and *beseeching* men, in Christ's stead, to be reconciled unto God.—The object, therefore, which is principally respected in the divine government, viz. the work of redemption, to which all the affairs of angels, the rise and fall of earthly kingdoms and empires is subordinated, is the *object* and *end* of the Christian Ministry. “*We* (says the Apostle Paul) *are workers together with him.*”

THEREFORE, if it be important, that the doctrines and institutions of the Gospel be preserved pure and uncorrupted in the world—that a knowledge of them be diffused among mankind—the treaty of reconciliation be succeeded, and the souls of mankind saved, it is important that Ministers be found faithful. Yea, if it be important, that Christ himself, who is the “*Chief Bishop*,” be faithful, it is proportionably so, that Ministers should, for they are workers together with Him. There is no class of men so *immediately* engaged in the advancement of the cause of Christ, as Ministers are, by office: And the labors and exertions of no one set of men so immediately affect it.

3. ANOTHER reason why Ministers should be found faithful is, their *accountableness* to Christ, and the personal *interests* which they have at stake.

As they are the Ministers and Stewards of Christ, so
they

they must certainly give up an account of their Stewardship. And there is no class or order of men, whose account will be more solemn, or whose rewards will be more distinguished. Christ has seen fit to commit, to no order of men, such interests, as he has given in trust to Gospel Ministers. He, in his Providence, puts *some* men in trust, with an abundance of the *riches* and perishing articles of the present world. Some men he constitutes the *guardians* of the *civil* and *political* interests of mankind—but, to Ministers he has committed his *Gospel*, and the *management* of the affairs of his Church and kingdom.—They are “*Stewards of the Mysteries of God.*” As they have the most important interests given them in trust, so their account will be peculiarly solemn and interesting.

It is a scripture maxim, that “where much is given, much will be required :” and, that future rewards will be proportioned to the *talents* which have been received.

How great and solemn then the rewards, either of Life or Death, which are reserved for Gospel Ministers ! The talents with which they are intrusted are *singularly* great. How distinguished are their advantages ! Their work and business leads them to be *forever* conversant with those truths, on which their *own* eternal salvation is depending. Their *whole* time is to be devoted to *searching* into the mysteries of God, and *preaching* the “unsearchable riches of Christ.”—Their office leads them to devote *every day* to the business of religion. This peculiar privilege is given them by Christ. They have the best opportunity to make advances in knowledge and understanding, and to grow and increase in all Christian graces. They are under the most singular advantages, to advance their *own* spiritual interests ; and to be peculiarly instrumental in promoting the salvation of their *fellow creatures*.

From these considerations, the inference is clear and striking, that of all men, the account which Gospel Ministers

Ministers will finally render, will be the most solemn, and their rewards and retributions the most distinguished. If they be faithful, they will "shine as the brightness of the firmament and as stars forever and ever."—But if, with their distinguished trusts, peculiar advantages and multiplied talents, they are *unfaithful*, they must expect that their future destiny will be as eminently wretched and deplorable.

Finally,

4. THE last reason, I have now time to mention, why Ministers should be faithful, is the present *state* of the world and *circumstances* of religion.

THE circumstances of the present time are such as call for the faithful and most strenuous exertions of Ministers. The broad way to ruin, we have reason to think, is peculiarly thronged and crowded. It is a truth, however lamentable, that, although the Gospel has been enjoyed in this nation in the most liberal manner, open Infidelity and down-right Deism are prevalent to an alarming degree; and that among some of the influential, and otherwise most promising characters in the nation—other errors of various kinds, not less *baleful* in their influence, are creeping in and gaining ground among us. But this is not all, however great the dangers are, on account of the considerations which have been mentioned; yet may it not be said they are equally great, if not more alarming, from other attending circumstances?

It is too obvious to escape notice, that among those who call themselves *believers* in the *Christian system*, there is a most stupid and prevailing negligence, relative to instituted means of grace, and the most important requirements of the Gospel. *Peace, Peace*, a little more *sleep* and a little more *slumber*, is the *general cry* among mankind. There appears, in general, very little concern to secure the salvation, or to live upon the pure and holy maxims of the Gospel.

D

OUR

OUR dangerous and alarming situation would have been much less, had not *professors of religion*, or the *Churches*, fallen into the general delusion. Is it not obvious, that professors of Christ, if not the pastors of the Churches, are gradually declining from the pure maxims of the Gospel, and adopting those of this world? Where is that *strict, fervent* piety and *brotherly love*, which so eminently distinguished the followers of Christ, in the primitive ages of Christianity? That *watchfulness* and *discipline*, which rendered the *Church*, formerly, so fair, and terrible as an army with banners, is almost departed from us.—There is such a departure from the pure doctrines of grace, that if the members of the Churches in general, were really tried by them, as a *test* of their Christian standing, and as a *term* of Christian communion, have we not reason to fear it would shake them to the very centre!

BUT, if my fears and apprehensions should be thought, by any, to be carried too far, yet most certainly it is the case, that the prevalence of errors of various kinds, a loss of moral sense, and stupidity, relative to eternal things, are so prevalent, that the road to ruin must be exceedingly thronged, and the cause of religion and virtue must be greatly on the decline.

THIS being the case, there is now a peculiar reason, why Ministers should be faithful, and exert themselves with uncommon zeal—They are Stewards of the mysteries of God. Therefore, when the great and essential doctrines of the Gospel are so much called in question, and practical religion is so much on the decline, they should “contend earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints,” and enforce the practice of the holy precepts of the Gospel, by every motive which can be derived from this or the other world.—In a time of danger, faithfulness is peculiarly requisite: and the call upon Ministers, as Stewards of the mysteries of God, must be proportionably urgent.

I SHALL now pass on to the improvement of the subject. . . IM-

I M P R O V E M E N T.

MANY very interesting and important inferences may be made, from the thoughts which have been suggested ; but time will not admit of my enlarging on them. I shall, therefore, only suggest a few things of this kind, without enlargement, and pass on to the addresses which are usual on occasions like the present.

THE view we have had may lead us to see, that *humility* and *sobriety* become Gospel Ministers. Their work is great and weighty—their account is solemn—and their zeal, at least, is greatly disproportioned to the important work which is assigned them.

WE also see, from what has been said, that it becomes them to be painful and laborious in their attention to the sacred truths which Christ has revealed in the Gospel ; for they are the servants of Christ, are to be subject to his will ; and the Gospel is committed to their trust, and they are Stewards of those sacred mysteries.

WE also learn, from what has been said, what care and caution Ministers ought to exercise, in introducing persons into the work of the Gospel Ministry. Such as are thus introduced, are made the Stewards of the mysteries of God—and faithfulness in Stewards is always necessary ; but above all in the present case.—Men of *approved* abilities and *unshaken* fidelity, must be the only proper persons to be introduced into such an important office.

THE bare mention of these things must suffice.—I shall now close with an address or two, suited to the present occasion—

1. To the candidate for Ordination at this time.

DEAR SIR,

THE observations which have now been made, relative to the work & business on which you are now about
to

to enter, teach you, that it is a work of unspeakable solemnity—you are now to have the mysteries of God committed to you, and to be introduced into the office of a Steward—you will venture to take upon you such an office, and to enter upon the sacred charge in the *name* and trusting upon the *gracious aid* of the redeemer—His strength is sufficient, and alone sufficient to embolden and support a sensible mind.

You will consider, that although you are introduced into a most dignified office, you are but a *servant* of Christ—are to be directed and authorized in all your administrations by his will only—and, that you being among the servants of Jesus Christ, are by no means authorized to *lord* it over God's heritage.

THE Gospel, which is now to be committed to your trust, is *in its nature sacred*; and *important* in its influence. That it be kept *pure* and *uncorrupted*, is a matter in which the *glory* of God and the *salvation* of the souls of men are deeply concerned. You will ever remember, that the mysteries of God are committed to you, not merely for your own amusement, profit or direction, but to be dealt out and communicated unto the Church and people of God, who are committed to your charge.—A very great and important branch of your work consists, in preaching and unfolding to others, the *mysteries* of God. It will, therefore, ever be important, that you study and pry into them, with the most constant application and unremitted diligence: for unless you have a clear understanding of them, you cannot unfold them to others.

You will be careful to declare "*the whole Counsel of God.*" You will not cast such a reflection on the great author of the Gospel, as to conclude, that he has undertaken to reveal any truths in his word, which are unsuitable to be held forth in your public discourses. There are truths which may be *incomprehensible* to men, but if there are, Christ would have them enforced. There are truths which may bear hard on the corruptions and pride

of

of the human heart ; and in preaching them, you may be exposed to the reproaches of men of corrupt minds ; nevertheless, you must not shun to declare them—you must not soften them for the sake of popular applause ; but *boldly*, and without *fear* or *shame*, declare and inculcate them, whether men will “ *hear or forbear*.”—Let your discourses consist, not of the “ *enticing words of man’s wisdom*,” but be richly fraught with divine truth. You are wisely to adapt Gospel truths to the spiritual circumstances of your flock, and to dwell more copiously and frequently, on those doctrines which are considered as of the most importance in sacred writ ; and your discourses are to be so framed and calculated as to instruct and edify serious minds.

As you are to deal out Gospel truths, as the state of your flock may require, so it will ever be your duty to be much conversant with them—you are *rightly to divide* the word of truth, and to give to every one his portion in due season. This will lead you to make a most important distinction between *saints* and *sinners*—not to cry peace and comfort to the *latter*, but to feed the *former* with all the consolations which can be derived from Gospel promises.

SEE to it that you are faithful ; for this is required of a Steward. Should you be unfaithful, you would be unfaithful to the best of Lords, injure the most important cause, and destroy the souls of men. But if, on the contrary, you should obtain mercy of the Lord to be faithful, what an important instrument might you be of doing good ; and how comforting would the reflexion be, in the day when you shall be called to give an account of your Stewardship !—How long you will be permitted to continue in office, no one knows, excepting God ; but you cannot continue a long time, by reason of death—how early your Lord may call for you, is an impenetrable secret. Be engaged, therefore, in your labors, and do all the good you can. Be instant in season and out of season.

It is fuitable, as you enter into the sacred office, not only to depend on, but to acknowledge, the grace & mercy of God, in allotting to you so important a portion, as to labour in his vineyard.—In making it your *constant* and *daily* business to attend to the sacred truths of the Gospel, and to spend your life in prying into the mysteries of God, which are the source of all Christian comfort and consolation.

MAY you, Dear Sir, so improve your opportunities, and discharge the duties of your office, as that you may be made an happy instrument of turning many to righteousness, and of preserving pure and uncorrupted, the doctrines and institutions of the Gospel among this people. And when you shall be called off from your labours, to give an account of your Stewardship, may you be so happy as to meet the approbation of your judge, and to be received into the joy of your Lord and master.

2. I ASK the patience of the audience, while I briefly address the Church and people of God in this place.

DEARLY BELOVED,

THIS is a joyful day with you, after the gloomy prospects you have had, respecting the stated enjoyment of the Gospel Ministry. We rejoice with you, that the clouds are dispersed, and the prospects before you are so bright and flattering.

YOUR pastor-elect, who is now to be introduced into the office of a Gospel Minister, you are sensible, I trust, is to receive a most *weighty* and *important* charge.—He is to be a Steward of the mysteries of God. It will be his duty to preach to you *all* the doctrines of the Gospel. *His* duty and *your* interest do require that he be faithful, whatever the consequences may be. It must be your duty, therefore, to give him aid, support and encouragement in such a work. It must be your duty to be constant in attending on his preaching and administrations. You cannot well conceive how mortifying and discouraging it must be to a minister, to spend the week
in

in preparing to communicate important and interesting truths to his people, when he enters the house of God, to be obliged to address *naked walls* and *empty seats*. My brethren and friends, you will not, I trust, thus discourage and mortify your pastor, in prosecuting his ministry.

If he is faithful, and should declare to you the *whole* Counsel of God, he may and will *hurt* the feelings and *wound* the pride of sinners. But then the *glory* of God, and the *salvation* of your souls, as well as *his* duty, require that it be done—Therefore, encourage him in being a *plain* and *pungent* preacher of *all* the truths of the Gospel. And let it be your daily prayer unto God, on his behalf, that by grace he may be rendered such a faithful minister.

His charge being so weighty, and his work so important, you will not increase his anxiety and burden, by a rejection of Gospel truth, or by *hard* and *unkind* treatment of him; should you load him with trials of this kind, you would be most unmerciful and inexcusable. You cannot expect that he will be without those infirmities which are allotted to men in this imperfect state; let these serve to exercise your charity. You will consider him as in *youth*, and as yet *inexperienced* relative to the trials he may meet with, and those cases of difficulty which call for the wisdom and experience of *grey hairs* to direct; you will, therefore, instead of being *censorious*, and ready to put the *worst* construction on every incidental failing, ever give him your friendly aid—And in case of an *apprehended* or ever a *real* failing, you will, instead of suffering prejudice to arise, and evil passions to rankle in your hearts, or of publishing it to others, in a friendly and benevolent manner unbosom yourselves to him, who, I dare engage, will ever consider it as a distinguished mark of your benevolence and friendship.

FINALLY, my brethren, “*be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.*”

CON-

CONCLUSION.

MAY we one and all, who are present, whether Ministers or people, be excited and quickened to fidelity. Let it be remembered, not only that Ministers must give an account of their Stewardship, but that their hearers must also meet them at the bar of the great Jehovah. Then will be brought into view, all their transactions with each other ; not only, how *Ministers* have preached and discharged the duties of their office, but how *hearers* have heard and treated the sacred truths which have been preached to them. Then those, who have been *faithful*, whether *preachers* or *hearers*, shall receive the rewards of *life* and *glory*. But, on the other hand, those who have been *unfaithful* and *disobedient*, will be disowned and rejected ; and receive, as their unalterable & everlasting portion, *indignation* and *wrath*, *tribulation* and *anguish*.

MAY God have mercy on us all, for Christ's sake.

A M E N.

24 JU 68